NUMB. XLVII.

The SPECTATOR.

Ride ſi ſapis — Mart.

Tueſday, April 24. 1711.

MR. *Hobbs*, in his Diſcourſe of Human Nature, which, in my humble Opinion, is much the beſt of all his Works, after ſome very curious Obſervations upon Laughter, concludes thus: 'The Paſſion of Laughter is nothing elſe but ſudden Glory ariſing from 'ſome ſudden Conception of ſome Eminency in our 'ſelves, by Compariſon with the Infirmity of others, 'or with our own formerly: For Men laugh at the 'Follies of themſelves paſt, when they come ſud'denly to Remembrance, except they bring with 'them any preſent Diſhonour.

According to this Author therefore, when we hear a Man laugh exceſſively, inſtead of ſaying he is very Merry, we ought to tell him he is very Proud. And indeed, if we look into the bottom of this Matter, we ſhall meet with many Obſervations to confirm us in his Opinion. Every one laughs at ſome Body that is in an inferior State of Folly to himſelf. It was formerly the Cuſtom for every great Houſe in *England* to keep a tame Fool dreſs'd in Petticoats, that the Heir of the Family might have an opportunity of joking upon him, and divert himſelf with his Abſurdities. For the ſame Reaſon Ideots are ſtill in requeſt in moſt of the Courts of *Germany*, where there is not a Prince of any great Magnificence who has not two or three dreſs'd, diſtinguiſh'd, undiſputed Fools in his Retinue, whom the reſt of the Courtiers are always breaking their Jeſts upon.

The *Dutch*, who are more famous for their Induſtry and Application, than for Wit and Humour, hang up in ſeveral of their Streets what they call the Sign of the *Gaper*, that is, the Head of an Ideot dreſs'd in a Cap and Bells, and gaping in a moſt immoderate manner: This is a ſtanding Jeſt at *Amſterdam*.

Thus every one diverts himſelf with ſome Perſon or other that is below him in Point of Underſtanding, and triumphs in the Superiority of his Genius, whilſt he has ſuch Objects of Deriſion before his Eyes. Mr. *Dennis* has very well expreſſed this in a Couple of humorous Lines, which are part of a Tranſlation of a Satire in Monſieur *Boilean*.

Thus one Fool lolls his Tongue out at another,
And ſhakes his empty Noddle at his Brother.

Mr. *Hobbs*'s Reflection gives us the Reaſon why the inſignificant People above-mention'd are Stirrers up of Laughter among Men of a groſs Taſte: But as the more Underſtanding Part of Mankind do not find their Riſibility affected by ſuch ordinary Objects, it may be worth the while to examine into the ſeveral Provocatives of Laughter in Men of ſuperior Senſe and Knowledge.

In the firſt Place I muſt obſerve, that there is a Set of merry Drolls, whom the common People of all Countries admire, and ſeem to love ſo well, *that they could eat them*, according to the old Proverb: I mean thoſe circumforaneous Wits whom every Nation calls by the Name of that Diſh of Meat which it loves beſt. In *Holland* they are termed *Pickled Herrings*; in *France*, *Jean Pottages*; in *Italy*, *Maccaronies*; and in *Great Britain*, *Jack Puddings*. Theſe merry Wags, from whatſoever Food they receive their Titles, that they may make their Audiences laugh, always appear in a Fool's Coat, and commit ſuch Blunders and Miſtakes in every Step they take, and every Word they utter, as thoſe who liſten to them would be aſhamed of.

But this little Triumph of the Underſtanding, under the Diſguiſe of Laughter, is no where more viſible than in that Cuſtom which prevails every where among us on the Firſt Day of the preſent Month, when every Body takes it in his Head to make as many Fools as he can. In proportion as there are more Follies diſcover'd, ſo there is more Laughter raiſed on this Day than on any other in the whole Year. A Neighbour of mine, who is a Haberdaſher by Trade, and a very ſhallow conceited Fellow, makes his Boaſts that for theſe Ten Years ſucceſſively he has not made leſs than an Hundred *April* Fools. My Landlady had a falling out with him about a Fortnight ago, for ſending every one of her Children upon ſome *Sleeveleſs Errand*, as ſhe terms it. Her eldeſt Son went to buy an Halfpenny worth of Inkle at a Shoemakers; the eldeſt Daughter was diſpatch'd half a Mile to ſee a Monſter; and, in ſhort, the whole Family of innocent Children made *April* Fools. Nay, my Landlady her ſelf did not eſcape him. This empty Fellow has laughed upon theſe Conceits ever ſince.

This Art of Wit is well enough, when confined to one Day in a Twelve-month; But there is an ingenious

ingenious Tribe of Men ſprung up of late Years, who are for making *April* Fools every Day in the Year. Theſe Gentlemen are commonly diſtinguiſhed by the name of *Biters*; a Race of Men that are perpetually employ'd in laughing at thoſe Miſtakes which are of their own Production.

Thus we ſee, in proportion as one Man is more refined than another, he chuſes his Fool out of a lower or higher Claſs of Mankind; or, to ſpeak in a more Philoſophical Language, that ſecret Elation and Pride of Heart which is generally call'd Laughter, ariſes in him from his comparing himſelf with an Object below him, whether it ſo happens that it be a Natural or an Artificial Fool. It is indeed very poſſible that the Perſons we laugh at may in the main of their Characters be much wiſer Men than our ſelves, but if they would have us laugh at them, they muſt fall ſhort of us in thoſe Reſpects which ſtir up this Paſſion.

I am afraid I ſhall appear too Abſtracted in my Speculations, if I ſhow that when a Man of Wit makes us laugh, it is by betraying ſome Oddneſs or Infirmity in his own Character, or in the Repreſentation which he makes of others; and that when we laugh at a Brute or even an Inanimate thing, it is at ſome Action or Incident that bears a remote Analogy to any Blunder or Abſurdity in reaſonable Creatures.

But to come into common Life, I ſhall paſs by the Conſideration of thoſe Stage Coxcombs that are able to ſhake a whole Audience, and take Notice of a particular ſort of Men who are ſuch Provokers of Mirth in Converſation, that it is impoſſible for a Club or Merry-meeting to ſubſiſt without them; I mean, thoſe honeſt Gentlemen that are always expoſed to the Wit and Raillery of their Well-wiſhers and Companions; that are pelted by Men, Women and Children, Friends and Foes, and, in a word, ſtand as *Butts* in Converſation, for every one to ſhoot at that pleaſes. I know ſeveral of theſe *Butts*, who are Men of Wit and Senſe, though by ſome odd turn of Humour, ſome unlucky Caſt in their Perſon or Behaviour, they have always the Misfortune to make the Company merry. The Truth of it is, a Man is not qualified for a *Butt*, who has not a good deal of Wit and Vivacity, even in the ridiculous ſide of his Character. A ſtupid *Butt* is only fit for the Converſation of ordinary People: Men of Wit require one that will give them Play, and beſtir himſelf in the abſurd part of his Behaviour. A *Butt* with theſe Accompliſhments, frequently gets the Laugh of his ſide, and turns the Ridicule upon him that attacks him. Sir *John Falſtaff* was an Hero of this Species, and gives a good Deſcription of himſelf in his Capacity of a *Butt*, after the following manner; *Men of all Sorts* (ſays that merry Knight) *take a pride to gird at me. The Brain of Man is not able to invent any thing that tends to Laughter more than I invent, or is invented on me. I am not only Witty in my ſelf, but the Cauſe that Wit is in other Men.*

Compleat Setts of this Paper, for the Month of March, are to be ſold by Mr. Graves in St. James's Street; Mr. Lewis under Tom's Coffee-Houſe, Covent-Garden; Mr. Lillie, Perfumer, the Corner of Beauford-Buildings; Mr. Sanger at the Temple Gate, Mr. Knapton in St. Paul's Church-Yard, Mr. Round in Exchange Ally, and Mrs. Baldwin in Warwick-Lane.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

For the Benefit of Mr. Booth.

At the Deſire of ſeveral Ladies of Quality.

By her Majeſty's Company of Comedians.

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane this preſent Tueſday, will be preſented the Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice. The part of Othello to be perform'd by Mr. Booth, Caſſio by Mr. Powel, Jago by Mr. Cibber, Brabantio Mr. Keene, Roderigo by Mr. Bowen, Deſdemona by Mrs. Bradſhaw, Emilia by Mrs. Saunders: And all the other Parts to the beſt Auvantage.

For the Benefit of Signiora Lody, this Day the 24th of April, at Humes dancing School in Frith Street Soho, will be a Conſort of Vocal and Inſtrumental Muſick; a new Cantata with a Solo on the Harpſicord perform'd by Mr. Babell Junior, with Variety of Concortos, and other Pieces Compoſed and perform'd by Mr. Corbet and other of the beſt Maſters, beginning at 7 a Clock. Tickets are to be had at the Smyrna Coffee-houſe, and at the door, at 5 s. each.

The Silk Gown Shop at Mrs. Attaway's, in Devereux Court in the Paſſage from the Temple to Eſſex Buildings, having now ſold off a great Quantity of Gowns, hath now a freſh and far greater parcel than at firſt, of rich Brocaded Silks, Venetian Damaſks, Tabbies, and Thread Satins lined with Thread Satins, and all other ſuitable and agreeable Lining, ſo that any Gentleman that wants may be furniſhed with Gowns of any Size or Price, at a much cheaper Rate than at any other Shop, the Price being ſet on each Gown.

In a few Days will be Publiſh'd

The Life and Acts of Mathew Parker, the Firſt Archbiſhop of Canterbury in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth. Under whoſe Primacy and Influence the Reformation of Religion was happily Effected; and the Church of England Reſtored, and Eſtabliſhed upon the Principles whereon it ſtands to this Day. Wherein are related the ſaid Archbiſhop's Actions in Eccleſiaſtical Commiſſions and Synods: His Viſitations of the Dioceſes, Colleges and Hoſpitals within his Province, with his Injunctions and Regulations: Characters and Accounts of the Biſhops by him Conſecrated: His Endeavours for Uniformity: His Diligence in Retrieving, and Publiſhing many Saxon, and other Ancient Hiſtorical MSS. of this Nation: His Procuring a more correct Tranſlation of the Holy Bible: His Government of his own Dioceſe of Canterbury: His ſober Thoughts, Counſels and Cares for Religion and this Church: And many Particulars of the Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory of thoſe Times, hitherto Unknown, or very Obſcure, are diſcovered and brought to Light. Compiled Faithfully out of Records, Regiſters, State-Papers, Orders of Council, Authentic Letters, and ſundry other Original MSS. In Four Books. To which is added, An Appendix, containing various Tranſcripts of Records, Letters, Inſtruments, Ordinances, Commiſſions, Diſcourſes, Relations, Intelligences, and other ſecret Papers, above an Hundred in Number; for the Aſſerting or Illuſtrating the foregoing Hiſtory. Among which will be found the Latin Life of this A. Bp. Entituled, Matthæus, ſo much and ſo long wanted in the Editions of the Britiſh Antiquities. By John Strype, M. A. Printed for John Wyat, at the Roſe in St. Paul's Church-yard.

The Retir'd Gardner. Vol. I. Being a Tranſlation of *Le Jardinier Solitaire*, or, Dialogues between a Gentleman and a Gard'ner: Containing the Methods of Making, ordering and Improving a Fruit and Kitchin-Garden with many new Experiments, from the Second Edition Printed at Paris; together with the Manner of planting and Cultivating Flowers, Plants, Shrubs, and Under-Shrubs, neceſſary for the Adorning of Gardens, &c. Vol. II. Containing the Manner of planting and Cultivating all ſorts of Flowers, Plants, Shrubs, and Under-Shrubs, Neceſſary for the Adorning of Gardens; In which is Explain'd, the Art of Making and Diſpoſing of Parterres, Arbours of Greens, Wood-Works, Arches, Columns, and other Pieces and Compartments uſually found in the moſt Beautiful Gardens of Country-Seats. The whole enrich'd with Variety of Figures, being a Tranſlation from the Sieur Louis Liger. To the Volume is added, a Deſcription and Plan of Count Tallard's Garden at Nottingham. The whole Revis'd, with ſeveral Alterations and Additions, which render it proper for our Engliſh Culture, By George London, and Henry Wiſe. Printed for Jacob Tonſon, at Shakeſpear's Head over againſt Catherine-Street in the Strand.

Juſt Publiſhed, and Printed very Correctly, with a neat Elzever Letter, in 12 mo. for the Pocket,

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The Grecian Hiſtory Vol. I. Containing the ſpace of 1684. Years. By Temple Stanyan, adorn'd with Cuts. Printed for Jacob Tonſon at Shakeſpear's Head over-againſt Catherine-ſtreet in the Strand.

LONDON: Printed for *Sam. Buckley*, at the *Dolphin* in *Little-Britain*; and Sold by *A. Baldwin* in *Warwick-Lane*; where Advertiſements are taken in; as alſo by *Charles Lille*, Perfumer, at the Corner of *Beauford-Buildings* in the *Strand*.